

News Release

April 7, 2016



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What to do for cold and flu?

Provided by the MCPHS University Pharmacy Outreach Program

Worcester, MA - A majority of us are affected by the cold and flu season each year and go to our local pharmacies when rest, fluids, and washing our hands are not providing relief. But it is important to remember that as we get older, we should not take some medications. Sudafed and Benadryl are two over-the-counter medications commonly used for cold symptoms however, seniors take note. These drugs may cause older people to fall and have an increase in blood pressure.

Nowadays, in addition to treating symptoms, people try to be proactive by taking zinc and vitamin C to prevent or shorten the duration of a cold. Normally, older adults have less zinc in their body. Zinc helps to make the immune system stronger. Taking a medicine like Zicam (zinc product) will not get rid of your cold symptoms, but it might decrease the time you have a cold by one day. Zinc can taste bad and upset your stomach, and at higher doses can cause stomach cramps and diarrhea. It can also act against some antibiotics. If you are thinking about trying zinc, it should be taken within 2 days of when you start to feel sick. Zinc lozenges can be taken every 2 hours while you are awake. Each dose should be 9-24 mg of elemental zinc. This information can be found on the back of the package.

If you have low levels of vitamin C, taking vitamin C may be helpful. Products like Emergen-C contain 1,000 mg of vitamin C and other vitamins and electrolytes. It comes in packets, which can be taken once a day after mixing with 4 to 6 ounces of water. Vitamin C is also sold in tablet form. The body can use only about 500 mg of vitamin C at one time, any extra is eliminated from the body. Patients with kidney problems should not take a lot of vitamin C because it can cause kidney stones. Usually, eating a balanced diet is just as good as taking extra vitamin C.

Airborne is another product available over the counter. It has zinc, vitamin C and other vitamins. This can be taken every 3 to 4 hours. People who are on a low salt diet should be careful with this medicine. There is no proof that this medication works. While taking zinc and vitamin C are becoming popular for treating cold and flu, it is important to talk to your doctor or pharmacist before buying these products.

Formerly known as the MassMedline, the Pharmacy Outreach Program is a MCPHS University community service program sponsored in part by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs and the Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging. We are a team of case managers and pharmacists working together to ensure residents can afford their medications, take their medications correctly, and understand different insurance coverage options like Medicare. For free assistance, Massachusetts residents can speak to staff or schedule an appointment on our Worcester Campus by calling 1-866-633-1617 or by going online to www.mcphs.edu/pharmacyoutreach.

References:

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